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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on long-term effects of a fifth-grade intervention for high-risk students. The intervention, "Just Do It, Jr." (JDR), was a collaborative after-school program between University of Nevada Cooperative Extension and the Elko County School District (Nevada), in which fifth-graders at risk of academic failure participated in a life skills curriculum and served as teachers for younger students. The program addressed personal, school, family, and community issues and focused on individual and family strengths and on building self-esteem. As part of a district needs assessment, all students in grades 8, 10, and 12 completed a 177-item questionnaire that examined personal and educational concerns. Among 8th- and 10th-grade respondents, 107 indicated that they had participated in JDI in grade 5. When compared to other students, the JDI group showed no differences in overall grades, grade repetition, or cutting classes. Differences were found between the groups in how well they liked school, importance of school to parents, and length of time they planned to go to school. The top 10 concerns of the two groups were similar, but the JDI group was significantly more concerned than other students about personal safety in the community, abuse, and pregnancy prevention. Other students were more likely than the JDI group to desire further information on preventing AIDS, postsecondary education, and paying for further education. The data indicate that the fifth-grade intervention had positive long-term effects on school success. (SV)

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Success of High-Risk Students after Completion of an Elementary School Intervention Program: A Longitudinal Study

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Success of High-Risk Students after Completion of an Elementary School Intervention Program: A Longitudinal Study

Introduction

The longitudinal cohort study (Borg & Gall, 1983)described in this report is part of a larger collaborative study of all 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students in the Elko County School District (ECSD) in rural Nevada. The larger study was a needs assessment survey of that population. For this longitudinal study, the investigators were particularly interested in a particular sub-set of that population. Those were students who had completed an intervention program in the 5th grade and were identified. The 8th and 10th grade students simply responded "yes" or "no" to the question "Were you enrolled in JDI program in elementary school?"

The fifth-grade intervention was a collaborative after-school program between University of Nevada Cooperative Extension and the Elko County School District. Known locally as "Just Do It, Jr." (JDI), the program focused on a life-skills education curriculum and involved the high-risk youth as peer teachers for younger age students. Youth-at-risk of academic failure were referred to this after-school program by elementary teachers. The program was designed using criteria outlined by Joy Dryfoos (1990) and emphasized an ecological model (Brofenbrenner, 1979). The program addressed personal, school, family, and community issues and built on individual and family strengths. Building self-esteem was an important program component

The major questions this study sought to answer were: 1) How are the former 5th grade JDI students doing compared to the other students in the district?; 2) Do the needs of these high-risk students continue to be different from other students in the district?; and 3) What are the major differences?

Methodology

The survey was accomplished using an investigator designed questionnaire. The content and design was based on input from teen age focus groups and was reviewed by a panel of experts. Except for demographic data, all questions were designed with a Likert scale or categorical response format.

All 8th, 10th, and 12th graders in the ECSD were surveyed. Slightly over 72 percent of the total N and over 75 percent of the former JDI students produced usable responses. Students responses not included in the results were either absent on the day the survey was administered and therefore did not complete a questionnaire or those who provided unusable data. Table 1 indicates the number of former JDI students completing the survey and the year these respondents were in the 5th grade program. Since the program began in 1991, no 12th grade students were former JDI students.

Table 1

Response Rate on the CohortLongitudinal Study from Former "Just Do It, Jr." Students

Grade	Number Indicating They Were JDI Members	Actual Number of JDI Members During 5th Grade
8th	57	77 (1993-94 class)
10th	35	45 (1991-92 class)
TOTAL	107	122

The data were scanned onto disk and analyzed via SPSS. Descriptive statistics were produced for each variable. A post-hoc rank order correlation of the top ten concerns of each group was performed to determine if the rankings were statistically similar. In addition, the Krusal-Wallis test (KW) was utilized to determine if differences existed between the responses of those students who had participated in the JDI and the general population. Krusal-Wallis results are reported as a chi-square. A non-parametric test was used since assumptions required for parametric test could not be met (Siegel, 1956). The questionnaire contained 177 total items. A list of the concerns which this report focuses on are found in Table 3.

Results

The first question asked by the investigators was how are the former 5th grade JDI students doing compared to other students in the district? Chi square analysis indicates that the JDI group was very similar in conventional measures of school success when compared to the population. There were no differences between the two groups in overall grades, number of times repeating a grade, and cutting classes. Differences were found between the two groups in how well they liked school, importance of school to parents, and length of time they plan to go to school. The JDI group was split over fondness of school between really disliking and really liking it. Former JDI students were more likely to report that their parents placed high value on education and higher overall satisfaction rating for school.

The second question that investigators asked was do the needs of the JDI students continue to be different from other students in the district? Table 2 displays the ten highest ranking concerns for each group. As is evident, the two groups had very similar concerns and were quite congruent with the top ten of the JDI group being the top ten for the population albeit with a different ordering. The post-hoc correlation of the rankings (Spearman's rho) of the two groups yielded an $r = .66$ which is statistically significant at the .05 level.

Table 2

Student Ranking of Concerns - top ten for JDI compared to the population

Rank &Percent Concerned & Very Concerned	JDI (%)	Other Students (%)
Parents understanding & supporting me	1 (74.8%)	3 (67.2%)
Preventing AIDS	2 (71.4%)	2 (71.6%)
Doing well in school	3 (70.8%)	1 (72.8%)
Getting along with parents/step-parents	4 (66.4%)	7 (58.4%)
Deciding what to do after high school	5 (63.8%)	4 (65.3%)
Pregnancy prevention	6 (62.3%)	10 (51.7%)
The quality of education I am getting	7 (62.2%)	8 (58.2%)
Making decisions	8 (61.3%)	6 (61.6%)
Paying for education after high school	9 (59.8%)	5 (62.4%)
Family using drugs/alcohol	10 (57.9%)	9 (57.4%)

$r = .66$ $p < .05$

While the top ten concerns were statistically similar as shown in Table 2 the entire list of concerns is shown in Table 3. A KW analysis was performed to answer the investigators third question "what are the major differences." Two comparisons were made of the groups. The first column is a comparison of the degree of concerns. There were only three concerns in which statistically significant differences were found. Those concerns were personal safety in the community, abuse (physical, sexual, and emotional), and pregnancy prevention.

The second column in Table 3 displays results of where student would like to receive more information in helping them deal with the concerns. The options were from parents, friends, school, non-school programs, and other adults. Those items where statistically significant differences occurred are preventing aids, deciding what to do after high school, paying for education after school, and the quality of education that I am getting. Generally, the JDI group was more likely to want to get information about theses topics from their parents.

Table 3

Student Ratings of Concerns

Concerns	χ^2 degree of concerns	χ^2 sources of information
Preventing AIDS	8.47	12.55*
Making decisions	5.30	3.48
Getting along with parents/step-	3.99	7.16
Parents understanding & supporting me	2.78	5.73
Deciding what to do after high school	7.07	10.35*
Using drugs & alcohol	6.36	5.00
Eating the right foods	4.14	7.73
Living up to parents' expectations	1.58	5.70
Friends using drugs/alcohol	2.48	1.81
Family using drugs/alcohol	3.97	5.87
Peer pressure to use drugs/alcohol	7.89	4.85
Paying for education after high school	5.37	10.83*
Getting along with classmates	6.34	6.56
Dating concerns	8.51	5.47
Peer pressure for sexual activity	1.55	4.10
Family having trouble paying bills	6.26	3.65
Personal safety at school	7.97	6.63
Personal safety in community	21.13**	6.10
Harassment from peers	6.24	2.75
Abuse (physical, sexual or emotional)	12.77*	4.35
Pregnancy prevention	14.96*	7.66
Gangs in your community	1.40	2.08
Having satisfying/enjoyable work	9.26	9.11
The quality of education I am	7.20	14.51*
Doing well in school	5.33	8.71
Getting along with teachers	5.48	2.14
Understanding other cultures	9.12	0.68

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

Summary and Conclusions

The major objectives the study sought to answer were: 1), how are the former 5th grade JDI students doing compared to the other students in the district?; 2) do the needs

of these high-risk students continue to be different from other students in the district?; and 3) what are the major differences? Since this program had been a collaborative effort between Cooperative Extension and the local school district both organizations were very interested to determine if these students were back in the "mainstream." The data presented here confirms that the students, while different on some respects, tend to be fairly typical on school issues when compared to the general population. Two concerns that both groups ranked in the top ten which was more than three rankings difference was (1) Pregnancy prevention and (2) paying for education after high school. The kind of education the JDI group indicated they would seek after high school was also different with more JDI indicating they planned to go to trade school.

One of the questions that each agency had in the beginning of the program for high risk youth is how will we ever know beyond the sort term whether this program has a lasting impact on participants. As stated earlier this was a population study that allowed the investigators the opportunity to investigate the concerns of those participants and compare the concerns against those of the population. Students at high-risk of academic failure do not typically have a high concern for doing well in school yet the JDI group rated this as their third highest concern. The rest of the surveyed population ranked this as their #1 concern.

Differences between the JDI and the rest of the surveyed population seem to be primarily personal, family and community issues. Pregnancy prevention was a higher concern for the JDI group with over 50% of the JDI very concerned. Abuse and personal safety in the community were also of higher concern for the JDI group. While not reported in the results data, the JDI group also indicated they were more likely to be in a gang. Community and family issues may contribute to this increased percentage of JDI in gangs than the general school population. The survey did not ask students their level of gang involvement. As a result of the reported gangs involvement of JDI students, additional programming for teachers, students and parents involved in the 5th grade program will be added to the JDI curriculum.

The investigators are pleased to report the school success of the JDI group. The personal, family and community problems these high-risk students continue to encounter are not surprising. Much of the life skills curriculum taught in the 5th grade was focused on helping these high-risk students cope with their situation in school.

The data indicates that school success, a major goal of the 5th grade program, is evident with the JDI group. There is an overall feeling of optimism about the future as the JDI students set goals toward trade school and future jobs. Overcoming the pregnancy prevention, abuse, and personal safety in their community issues will be determining factors for successful progression into a productive adulthood. This data provided important information for those persons conducting intervention programs targeted at academically high-risk youth.

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Abstract

Improvements in high-risk fifth-grade students school, home and personal achievements showed statistically significant improvements immediately following completion of a collaborative after-school program. University of Nevada Cooperative Extension and local school district officials completed a follow-up study to see if the program had any lasting impacts on the participants that are now in the 8th and 10th grades. Data indicate school success, a major goal of the program is evident for the JDI group. Personal, family, and community issues remain concerns. The students who are now in the 8th and 10th grade report an overall feeling of optimism about the future as they set goals toward trade school and future jobs. The data indicate that the targeted intervention program at the elementary school level has produced some desired long-term benefits.